

Eat right for your bones



Good nutrition is a key element in maintaining good bone health. By eating a balanced diet that includes optimal calcium, getting some sunlight to keep your vitamin D levels up, and maintaining a healthy body weight, you can lower your risk of developing osteoporosis. Other lifestyle factors that are important for bone health are moderation of alcohol intake, not smoking and maintaining regular safe physical activity.

Maintaining a healthy body weight

Staying in a healthy weight range is the most important thing you can do to maintain your bone health. A healthy body weight in older adults is indicated by a body mass index (BMI) between 20 and 25 (BMI = weight in kg/ [height in meters x height in meters]). People who are underweight typically have lower bone density and a much higher risk of fracture. This includes women of average height who weigh less than 55kg, and men of average height who weigh less than 60-65 kg.

A healthy body weight changes hormone levels and growth factors which have a positive effect on bone density. Being obese can offset these beneficial effects due to the higher risk of diabetes and possibly greater risk of falls – some fractures are actually more common in people who are obese.

Calcium

In New Zealand, we recommend a daily calcium intake from your diet that is equivalent to about 500mg or 2-3 servings of dairy products (e.g. milk, cheese, yoghurt). Non-dairy sources of calcium include tofu, dark green vegetables (spinach, broccoli), calcium rich nuts (almonds, Brazil nuts) and calcium-fortified dairy substitutes (e.g. almond or soy milk).



Vitamin D

Low levels of vitamin D reduce the body's ability to absorb calcium from the diet, and in extreme cases can result in under-mineralisation of the skeleton. It has also been linked with prevention of muscle weakness, which is important for avoiding falls. Fortunately, regular exposure to small amounts of sunshine can prevent vitamin D deficiency. For those who are unable to expose their skin to sunshine, such as those who are veiled, unwell, frail or elderly – as well as individuals with very dark skin – a low dose Vitamin D supplement can be taken.

Know Your Bones™

Visit bones.org.nz/knowyourbones to complete an online bone health assessment - you'll get a personalised report explaining your risk of fracture and osteoporosis, plus recommendations for better bone health.

Please share this fact sheet with friends and family if you think it would be useful to them, and encourage them to email join@bones.org.nz to receive more information and updates.